

and our places of gathering. Present in all 50 states, the oak has played a huge role in America's history as a valuable resource. It helped our founding fathers establish a new Nation, supplying building materials for the ever-expanding 13 original colonies. It served as a familiar sight to pioneers as they forged across the new republic to the west coast. And to this day it has remained an enduring, valuable, and highly-prized raw material from which beautifully crafted furniture, sturdy door and window framing, ornate flooring and paneling, and the like, are made. This enduring and mighty tree, which has long been a part of our national heritage and strength, fully merits the distinction as America's national tree.

The oak tree has also played a key role in many specific historic moments in our Nation's history. Abraham Lincoln found his way across a river near Homer, Illinois, using the Salt River Ford Oak as a marker. When King James II attempted to revoke Connecticut's charter, the "Charter White Oak" is said to have been the hiding place for the historic document. Andrew Jackson took shelter under Louisiana's Sunnybrook Oaks on his way to the Battle of New Orleans. And "Old Ironsides," the USS *Constitution*, earned its nickname from the strength of its live oak hull, famous for easily repelling British cannonballs.

Chosen by the people in a broad-based election, the oak tree represents the fundamental characteristics of the great nation: strength, endurance, and beauty. I urge each of my colleagues to make official what we have known for many years . . . that the oak tree is America's national tree.

IN HONOR OF ST. MARY, STAR OF
THE SEA SCHOOL

HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor St. Mary, Star of the Sea School, which will be celebrating its 125th Anniversary on October 2, 2004, in Bayonne, New Jersey.

Throughout the years, St. Mary's School, with the help of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, has provided the children of its parish with an excellent education and a strong spiritual foundation. More than 300 students from pre-school through eighth grade thrive at St. Mary's, and an additional 350 children participate in its Sunday school religious program. The long-standing tradition of quality at the school is mirrored by St. Mary's parish, which has diligently served the Bayonne community for 143 years.

Today, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring St. Mary, Star of the Sea School for its outstanding spiritual leadership and 125 years of excellence in education in Bayonne, New Jersey.

FREEDOM FOR OMAR MOISÉS RUIZ
HERNÁNDEZ

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Omar Moisés Ruiz Hernández, a political prisoner in totalitarian Cuba.

Mr. Ruiz Hernández is a peaceful pro-democracy activist in totalitarian Cuba. He is an independent journalist for the Decoro Working Group and was vice delegate of the Democratic Solidarity Party. The son of a reverend, his religious conviction and belief in freedom has made him a target of the dictatorship's thugs. According to Amnesty International, Mr. Ruiz Hernández was arrested in January and March 1996, interrogated in October 1997, and subject to ongoing harassment as he carried out his activities.

As an independent journalist, Mr. Ruiz Hernández has written about the nightmare that is the Castro regime. His articles have appeared on the CubaNet website. According to Reporters Without Borders, Mr. Ruiz Hernández has been harassed for his reporting on the malfunctioning of Cuban society under the totalitarian regime as far back as 1992.

In March, 2003, as part of the dictator's condemnable crackdown on peaceful pro democracy activists, Mr. Ruiz Hernández was arrested because of his belief in truth and liberty over propaganda and repression. In a sham trial, he was "sentenced" to 18 years in the inhuman, totalitarian gulag.

Mr. Ruiz Hernández is suffering from extreme abuse in the gulag. According to Reporters Without Borders, he has been held in "maximum harshness" including isolation in a 1.9 by 4 meter cell, as well as transferred to a cell with common prisoners. Mr. Ruiz Hernández is also ailing from diseases caused by the heinous conditions of the gulag.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ruiz Hernández is suffering in a grotesque gulag because he believes in truth and freedom. My Colleagues, it is absolutely unacceptable that peaceful pro-democracy activists are languishing in the depraved prisons of tyrants. We must demand immediate freedom for Omar Moisés Ruiz Hernández and every prisoner of conscience in totalitarian Cuba.

CENTENNIAL SAM VOLPENTEST

HON. NORMAN D. DICKS

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, last Friday night in Pasco, Washington several members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation attended an unusual event: the celebration of the 100th Birthday of a man who may be the world's oldest active lobbyist and one of the most successful and accomplished economic development leaders in the United States. Sam Volpentest, who was born on September 24, 1904 has been a real leader of the business community in the Tri-Cities community of central Washington state since the early

1960s. The cities of Pasco, Kennewick and Richland grew and developed around the Hanford Nuclear site following World War II, and Sam moved to the area in the late 1940s. His business interests led to his involvement in local economic development efforts, and in 1960 he began to lead the area's efforts to expand its energy-related work for the federal government and to diversify the regional economy. My earliest recollections of Sam were when I served on Senator Warren Magnuson's staff. Sam and the publisher of the local paper, Glenn Lee, would meet with the Senator, setting him in motion on another project, another building, another highway—always something that meant bringing more jobs to the area and always helping to make the Tri-Cities community economically stronger. There was the work on the N-Reactor, the FFTF—The Fast Flux Test Facility—and the FMEF—the Fuels and Materials Examination Facility. When I was elected to Congress from the 6th District, I was obviously enlisted in the cause, and since then have worked with all of the Congressmen from the 4th Congressional District—including Doc Hastings today—on important national security and energy research activities. We have worked on the cleanup of nuclear waste and on new missions for DOE-Hanford, on EMSL and, of course, the Volpentest Hazardous Materials and Emergency Response Training Center, named in honor of Sam. Along the way, Sam and I had countless discussions about dozens and dozens of other ideas he had over the years to diversify the region's economy and to keep the standard of living in the Tri-Cities as remarkably high as it is today.

Sam is truly a remarkable man who continues today—beyond his 100th birthday—to work on behalf of TRIDEC, the economic development authority in the Tri-Cities community. I would like my colleagues to read the tribute that was published on his birthday in the local newspaper. Following is an article that was published in the Tri-City Herald.

[From the Tri-City Herald]

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF SAM

(By John Trumbo, Herald staff writer)

The Tri-Cities' most celebrated birthday boy is having a party tonight at the Pasco Red Lion. The event includes just his family and a few friends, about 700 of them at last count.

Volpentest is pleased.

"I'd like to see everybody happy and have a good time," he said earlier this week from his office at the Tri-Cities Industrial Development Council in Kennewick.

Volpentest is looking forward to seeing some of his old friends, such as former Gov. Albert D. Rosellini, 94.

Volpentest and Rosellini go back more than three-quarters of a century when they were both members of an athletic club called the Italian Club in Seattle.

"I joined in 1933 at the age of 29. He was 23," recalled Volpentest.

A quarter of a century later, Rosellini was elected governor of Washington, and Volpentest was cutting political deals in the Tri-Cities for national lawmakers representing the Evergreen State. In Volpentest's world, friendships count a lot.

These days, Volpentest, who insists he is not retired despite doctor's orders to take it easier, comes into his office Monday through Friday. He continues to keep his hand in the game at TRIDEC on behalf of the Tri-Cities, calling in favors and calling on politicians in Washington, D.C., just like he has for nearly half a century.